

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00
EB-07 FMC-01 INR-07 NSAE-00 SAL-01 CG-00 DLOS-06
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6327
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E.O. 11652:N/A
TAGS: PFOR, CE, IN, PLOS
SUBJECT: FOREIGN FISHING TRAWLERS IN SRI LANKA WATERS

REF: (A) NEW DELHI 17757 (NOTAL), (B) COLOMBO A-951 (NOTAL)

1. DEBATE IN THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY RECENTLY HAS HIGHLIGHTED INCREASING PROBLEMS SRI LANKA HAS BEEN HAVING WITH FISHING TRAWLERS INTRUDING INTO SRI LANKA'S TERRITORIAL WATERS AND "ECONOMIC ZONE." MAIN INTRUDERS APPEAR TO BE INDIANS AND TAIWANESE, WITH JAPANESE AND SOUTH KOREAN TRAWLERS LESS PROMINENT.

2. TREATMENT OF FOREIGN FISHING BOATS DIFFERS ACCORDING TO THE COUNTRY OF REGISTRY. FISHERIES MINISTER S.D. R. JAYARATNE, UNDER PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONING, SAID THAT "TAKING ACTION AGAINST INDIAN POACHERS HAS BEEN A SENSITIVE ISSUE" BECAUSE OF THE CLOSE RELATIONS SRI LANKA HAS WITH THAT COUNTRY. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ROC, TRAWLERS FROM THAT COUNTRY ARE SWIFTLY PUNISHED.

3. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE USUAL PROCEDURE WITH INDIAN TRAWLERS IS TO BRING THEM INTO PORT, CONFISCATE THE CATCH, AND RELEASE THEM AFTER A FEW HOURS. ROC

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TRAWLERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE THEIR CATCH CONFISCATED

AND THEIR CREW PUT ON TRIAL. THE CREWS AND SHIPS ARE HELD UNTIL THE FINE LEVIED IS PAID WITH THE RESULT THAT SOME FISHERMAN HAVE BEEN KEPT IN SRI LANKA FOR MONTHS. SEVERAL ROC TRAWLERS ARE NOW BEING HELD IN TRINCOMALEE AWAITING PAYMENT OF THE FINES.

4. COMMENT: SRI LANKA IS IN NO POSITION TO ENFORCE ITS LAWS EVEN OVER A SMALL PORTION OF THE 200-MILE ECONOMIC ZONE ALLOWED FOR (ALTHOUGH NOT YET FORMALLY DECLARED) IN THE RECENTLY-PASSED MARITIME ZONES LAW (REF B). HOWEVER, PROTESTS FROM FISHERMEN AND THEIR PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATIVES HAVE PUT PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ARREST THE POACHERS THEY CAN FIND (USUALLY TRAWLERS WANDERING NEAR SRI LANKA NAVY BASES) AND TO TAKE UP THE MATTER ON A DIPLOMATIC LEVEL, AS IN THE CASE OF INDIA (REF A).
REED

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